

IV. APPLICATION EVALUATION AND RANKING FOR THE HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD RENEWAL AND PUBLIC FACILITIES CATEGORIES

Because of the serious problems faced by Montana communities, the demand for CDBG funds has typically exceeded the amount available. Because the program is competitive, MDOC has developed an application ranking procedure to methodically evaluate the degree to which a proposed project responds to the objectives of Montana's CDBG Program and the criteria for its type of project. The housing and public facilities grant categories use parallel but somewhat different ranking criteria in an effort to provide measures that are appropriate to each type of project.

The assignment of points allows MDOC staff to systematically rank the projects in order of quality in a manner that is accountable to the criteria in these guidelines. The point weights also provide a mechanism to compare ranking scores to assure that applications are being evaluated consistently and fairly.

A. SELECTION OF THE APPROPRIATE PROJECT CATEGORY

The selection of the appropriate project category is the applicant's responsibility. Local officials having any concern or questions regarding the proper category for the CDBG project they are considering should contact the MDOC for guidance as early as possible in the process of preparing an application. The applicant will be notified if an application is submitted under an inappropriate category.

The individual applications submitted under each project category will vary depending upon the project activities proposed, the size and character of the community applying, and each applicant's unique response to its own particular community's specific needs. Because no purely quantitative measures exist which can anticipate the variety of potential community development needs and all responses to them, the ranking must be, in part, subjective. In evaluating the applications, MDOC will take into account how well each applicant addresses the problems it has defined, relative to its capacity and resources.

SUGGESTION: Any project under consideration for a CDBG application should be compared against all of the ranking criteria (presented in Chapter V) for the appropriate project category. Each ranking criterion has been assigned a number representing its relative priority or weight. By reviewing the ranking criteria, the weight in potential points assigned to them and the examples of ranking issues that will be considered, applicants should have a better sense of the major issues involved in designing a competitive proposal.

Any person with a question or concern regarding any of the ranking criteria should contact the Department's CDBG staff prior to application. See Appendix D (Application Instructions and Format) and Appendix E (Suggestions for Writing A Successful CDBG Application).

B. RANKING PROCEDURES

1. Upon submission, MDOC CDBG staff will review each application for completeness and for conformance to federal and State CDBG requirements. An application may be disqualified from a scheduled grant competition if it fails to comply with a general requirement (applicable to all CDBG applications) or if it fails to comply with a special requirement (within the requested grant category). Disqualified applicants will be notified in writing of the reason for disqualification.

Applicants are expected to keep MDOC informed of any developments during the review process that could affect the viability of the proposed project. MDOC may contact the applicant to obtain omitted information, to clarify issues, or to verify information contained in the application.

2. Ranking teams for each project category will be appointed from MDOC staff. The ranking teams will evaluate applications using the appropriate criteria and numerical point systems described in these CDBG application guidelines. The ranking teams will serve in an advisory capacity to the MDOC Director regarding the applications that should be considered for CDBG awards. MDOC may provide for the evaluation of applications by technical authorities, state or federal agency staff, or qualified professionals, when necessary, to assure adequate review.

CDBG Program staff does not have the time or resources to conduct on-site reviews of CDBG proposals; therefore, applicants must adequately communicate to the ranking teams (through the written application submitted) the process used to determine community needs and applicants must demonstrate that they have proposed sound solutions to those needs. MDOC may supplement written application materials, as needed, by consulting public or private agencies knowledgeable about proposed projects, about particular community problems, or about the applicants' past performance in administering public facility or housing projects, other MDOC programs, or in managing public funds.

3. After reviewing each application and any technical review comments, the ranking team will assess the degree to which the proposed project responds to each of the applicable criteria. Scores will be assigned according to the point values established for each criterion. ***Failure to respond to a criterion or to comply with a pertinent and important application requirement will result in no points being awarded for that criterion.*** If the ranking team determines that the applicant has inadequately documented specific statements or claims made in responding to a criterion, it may assign the application a lower score than would otherwise have been assigned based on the statement or claim itself. Likewise, numerical or percentage claims, such as for benefit to low and moderate income persons, will be accepted and considered valid only to the extent to which accompanying documentation has clearly substantiated them and complied with MDOC requirements for documentation. Because each application must stand or fall according to the intrinsic merits of the written application submitted, representatives of the applicants may observe, but cannot offer comments in, the application review, discussion, and ranking process.
4. The ranking teams will submit their written findings and recommendations for grant awards to the MDOC Director for his or her consideration, based upon the order of scores assigned by the ranking teams for the applicants in each category. The Director will make the final decision on grant awards.

The actual number and types of awards will be subject to funding availability, the amount of each applicant's request, and the procedures set out under "Distribution of Funds." In the event of tie scores, preference will be given to applicants that have not received CDBG assistance before and on the basis of overall ranking of the proposed projects.

5. The MDOC Director may, at his or her discretion, reallocate unexpended CDBG funds in between normal grant application cycles to expedite necessary projects and the expenditures of CDBG funds consistent with the objectives of the Montana Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program.